

Animal Folk Tales from Around the World

Vol. 1



6169

Contents

Why elephants cannot fly 3

How the tiger got its stripes 5

Why the dog barks at and
chases everyone it sees 9

How the crocodile got its
rough, scaly back 13

Why the bat has no friends 17

Why the egret rides on the
water buffalo 21

ISBN 81-780-6051-5

© Publishers

UNICORN BOOKS Pvt Ltd.

J-3/16, Darya Ganj, New Delhi-110002

Phones: 23276539, 23272783/84, Fax: 23257790,

E mail: unicornbooks@vsnl.com



This is a fascinating tale originating from the Saora people of Orissa. Verrier Elwin, pioneering anthropologist who spent most of his adult life studying tribal culture, collected this tale from oral sources and presented it in his collection of folk tales called When the World was Young.



Why elephants cannot fly

Do you know that there was once a time, a long time ago when the world was young, when elephants had wings like birds? Each elephant had four big wings and they flapped them and flew about in the sky just like birds. In fact, God liked to use an elephant as his vehicle when he came down to Earth, during the process of Creation, because it was so big and strong and comfortable.

Soon, God's work was over. He had filled the Earth with all the plants and animals and people that he thought it needed and he did not have to travel around on an elephant anymore. The usefulness of elephants was over.

But by this time the elephants were used to flying around and they soon developed some very irritating habits. Sometimes they would crow like cocks and roosters and disturb everyone on Earth. At other times, when they were tired of flying around, they would perch on the rooftops of people's houses. Of course, the houses



collapsed under their enormous weight, but the elephants did not seem to realise or care that they had become a very big nuisance.

When God saw the amount of trouble the elephants were creating, he decided it was time to take action once more. He knew full well that the elephants would not give up their wings willingly, so he thought of an ingenious plan to trick them. He threw a lavish banquet and invited all the elephants to attend. The elephants were delighted when they saw the wonderful spread that God had laid out for them and they stuffed themselves so much they could barely move around.

After the feast, as they lay back to digest their food and fell asleep, God quietly cut off all the elephants' wings. The Saoras say that God gave two of each of those four wings to the peacock and that is how the bird got its lovely tail. The other two wings God stuck on the banana tree and that is how the tree got its big leaves.

When the elephants woke up, they discovered they had lost their wings forever. They went wild with rage and frustration – so wild that they scampered away into the depths of the jungle. They have lived there ever since and have never been able to fly again.



The stripes that adorn the bodies of some animals have always aroused man's interest and curiosity. Here is an interesting tale from Vietnam that explains how the tiger got its stripes. The people of Vietnam were once farmers and their buffaloes were very dear to them, as the creatures worked hard for them while they toiled to make a living from their lands. On the other hand, the tiger was a fearsome beast. This tale mirrors these attitudes.



How the tiger got its stripes

At a time so far back that no one remembers exactly when, animals could talk just the way people do. The events in this story happened during those magical times.

One day, after a busy farmer had finished ploughing his rice fields, he sat down to eat his lunch under a clump of banana trees. He left his buffalo to graze in the grassy embankment that encircled his fields.

Soon, the farmer fell asleep. The buffalo was wandering along peacefully, munching the fresh green grass, when a huge tiger leapt onto the embankment. He had a golden body with rippling muscles and sharp teeth. Though the buffalo trembled in fear as he faced the tiger, he stoically braced himself for battle.

But then, to his utter surprise, Buffalo heard Tiger say, "I have not come here as an enemy to eat you. I've come to ask you a question that has been bothering me for days."

"A question? What is it?" asked bewildered Buffalo.

"I've been watching you work with the farmer for days, and I marvel as to how he makes you work so hard from dawn to dusk. Why, I've even seen him beating you with a big stick sometimes!

He is such a puny creature with a small body that has little strength, yet he is able to dominate a mighty creature like you! He doesn't have sharp vision, or an acute sense of hearing or even a keen sense of smell, yet he rules you so easily. What is the source of his magic power over you?" asked Tiger.

"I don't know the source of his power," replied Buffalo slowly, "but I know that he has a talisman called wisdom and, because of this, I will always be in his power."

"I want to know more about this talisman called wisdom," said Tiger with shining eyes, "because I want to acquire it for myself! Can you imagine how it will help me? It would give me even greater power over all the other animals in the jungle. If I could command them the way the farmer commands you, I would not have to stalk and hunt the way I do now. I could merely order all the animals to remain motionless and then choose the most delicious one from them all for my meal."

Buffalo was unnerved when he heard this and told Tiger, "Why don't you ask the farmer yourself whether he will give you his talisman of wisdom?"

Tiger hurried to the farmer and woke him up. "Mr Man," he said, "you must be aware that I am the strongest, quickest and bravest animal in the jungle. I have heard that you own something called wisdom, which makes it possible for you to dominate and rule all other creatures. Well, I want





you to give this wisdom of yours to me. It will be very useful in my daily search for food.” Tiger growled ferociously after he had finished speaking so that the farmer realised he was serious and not to be trifled with.

The farmer scratched his head thoughtfully. “I would be very happy to give my wisdom to a splendid animal like you,” he said. “But I cannot do so, because it is not here with me. My wisdom is so precious to me that I keep it safely locked up in a box at home. I will have to go home and fetch it.”

“Very well,” said Tiger looking pleased. “I’ll come with you.”

“Oh no!” replied the farmer quickly. “If the people of my village catch sight of you, they will attack you with sticks and stones and beat you to death. You had better stay here till I return.”

The farmer took a few steps in the direction of his home and then he stopped suddenly. “How do I know that you are really here to acquire my wisdom?” he asked Tiger. “I am worried that you have really come here to eat my buffalo instead. I would not be able to bear it if you were to do that, because my buffalo is very dear to me. He helps me in all my work and I need him.”

Tiger did not know what to reply to this. The farmer continued: "If my mind is to be at rest when I go home, I will have to tie you up to a tree before I go. This way, I can be sure that my buffalo is safe."

Tiger was so eager to lay his hands on the farmer's wisdom that he agreed to this suggestion! The farmer bound Tiger securely to the trunk of a big tree with a stout rope. Then he hurried home and gathered a great armload of dry straw. When he returned to the tree, he placed the straw under the tree and set it on fire.

"Here is my wisdom!" he shouted at Tiger, as the flames began to rise and burn the animal. Tiger howled in pain and pleaded with the farmer to let him go, but the farmer ignored his cries. Then Tiger roared and raged so much that leaves on the nearby trees trembled. Finally, the fierce fire burned through the ropes that held Tiger captive and set him free. He slunk away into the jungle at once.

In time, Tiger's terrible wounds healed, but he was never able to get rid of the long black stripes on his golden body that were caused when the farmer's rope seared into his flesh. Tiger wears stripes on his body till today and he has never trusted man ever since.



Here is an old tale about Man's most faithful friend – the dog. This tale comes from the Ituri region of Africa and tells us, in an interesting way, why the dog barks at and chases everyone who goes near it.

Why the dog barks at and chases everyone it sees

When the Creator first made Dog he was satisfied that he had made a strong and good animal. He put him straightaway into the middle of a jungle and Dog promptly curled up under a tree and fell asleep.

Before long, a monkey came strolling along. Now Monkey was a very curious creature and his monkey eyes grew wide when he saw Dog – a creature that his eyes had never seen before. He stared at Dog for a long time, but couldn't make out what kind of animal he was. Finally, he scratched his head in bewilderment and hurried away to tell all the other animals about Dog.

News spreads in the jungle like wildfire and soon, every bird and beast knew that the Creator had put a strange new animal in their midst. All the animals were very curious to know more about it and they bombarded Monkey with lots of questions.

"Does he have a bushy tail like mine?" asked Fox, who was very proud of his tail.





“Does he have spots on his body the way I do?” asked Cheetah.

“Does he have a shell on his back?” asked Snail.

“Why don’t you come and have a look at him yourself?” said Monkey.

Soon, a big crowd of animals gathered at the spot where Dog was still sleeping.



“Well, now that you’ve seen him, what kind of animal is he?” Monkey asked interestedly.

“He’s not an elephant for sure!” exclaimed Elephant firmly shaking his head. “He doesn’t have a trunk and big ears.”

“He’s not an okapi either,” said a strange-looking animal that had the body of a horse and the striped legs of a zebra. “I know that for sure.”

“He can’t be a giraffe,” said Giraffe with a little laugh. “His neck is way too short for that!”

Scaly Pangolin, spotted Deer and thick-skinned Rhino also inspected Dog, and they all declared that he did not belong to their families either. Monkey was beginning to think that he would never find out what kind of beast Dog was, when Tortoise spoke up.





Tortoise was very old and wise and had been around since time and life began. “I was there when the Creator brought this creature down to the jungle for the first time,” Tortoise said. “And I know that his name is Dog.”

“Dog?” repeated all the other animals together loudly.

When Dog heard his name being called out, he jumped up in surprise. He looked at all the animals huddled around staring at him and he grew very angry indeed.

“Why are all of you staring at me?” he barked furiously. “You have disturbed my sleep and woken me up so rudely.” Then Dog flew at all the other animals, barking loudly and baring his teeth. He chased them till they all ran away.

Tortoise did not run away, of course – he merely withdrew his head into his shell! Dog was very pleased to realise that by barking and chasing all the other animals he could enjoy his peace, so before he fell asleep again, he decided he would do this every time someone approached him.

And that is why, to this very day, dogs bark and chase away those who go near them!



The toothy, wide-mouthed crocodile is a popular character, and often plays an important role in folk tales that originate from the African continent. In this ancient and popular tale from Angola – which also has a wonderful moral beautifully woven into it – we learn how the crocodile got his rough, scaly back.

How the crocodile got its rough, scaly back

6169

Many moons ago, when this story began in the jungles of deepest Africa, the crocodile had a back that was as smooth and shiny as that of the python. One hot summer afternoon, when Crocodile was sunbathing and dozing peacefully by the riverside, he heard a loud rustling noise close by. As he blinked his eyes sleepily in astonishment, a small rabbit came crashing through the tall jungle grass. He collided with Crocodile and then fell down in a heap. He was very tired and panting very hard.

“Dear me,” said Crocodile in a puzzled tone, “whatever are you up to Rabbit? Why did you come barging in so unexpectedly when I was having a quiet nap? And why are you huffing and puffing so hard.”

“I’m sorry for disturbing you,” said Rabbit with a gasp, “but I was running for my life! Man had set his dog to chase me and I had to use all my energy to keep away from those dangerous snapping jaws. I think Man wanted to turn me into rabbit stew!”





“Oh!” said Crocodile.

Then as Rabbit stared at Crocodile and his rows of sharp teeth, he gulped nervously. “You’re not hungry, are you?” he asked anxiously.

Crocodile smiled widely. “No,” he said. “I’ve eaten for today.”

Rabbit let out a great sigh of relief. “Thank God!” he said, wiping his brow. “I’ve had enough trouble for today. I don’t need any more!”

Crocodile smiled again. “Nothing ever troubles me,” he said proudly. “Nothing at all!”

Rabbit looked at Crocodile doubtfully. “Nothing at all?” he asked.

“Nothing!” said Crocodile loudly, rolling his great round eyes. “In fact, I’m quite sure that even Trouble knows what a formidable creature I am and he takes care to keep out of my way!”

Rabbit looked worried when he heard this. “Oh Crocodile,” he said in a low voice. “You should be very careful when you speak about Trouble. One never knows where he is lurking, and just when you think that he is not going to bother you, he will.”

Crocodile laughed scornfully when he heard this and went back to sleep. Rabbit shook his head ruefully and hopped away.

After a while, Crocodile woke up, and since he had nothing to do, he began to think about the conversation he had had with Rabbit. As he recalled how frightened Rabbit had been of Trouble, he began to get irritated.

“Who does Trouble think he is?” he murmured angrily to himself. “How dare he throw his weight around in the jungle? Perhaps I should find him and shake him up and tell him a thing or two about himself!”

- The more Crocodile thought about this, the angrier he became. Finally, he decided to go in search of Trouble himself, so that he could teach him a lesson.

Soon Crocodile was crashing through the dry grass and searching for Trouble. He peered behind trees, he looked under big stones and he even looked up into the trees to see if he could spot Trouble.

Then he opened his enormous mouth and began to shout, “Trouble, where are you? Come out and show yourself to me!”

Crocodile’s voice was so loud and harsh that it echoed in the jungle and startled Flamingo, who was fast asleep. Flamingo woke up with a start and began flapping her wings furiously. This, in turn,



startled Monkey who was enjoying a quiet smoke atop a tall tree. He fumbled with his pipe and it fell from his hands right into the thick long grass below. •

Crocodile was so busy thrashing about in the grass and shouting for Trouble that he did not see Monkey's pipe fall and set the grass ablaze. Soon the jungle was on fire. As the flames rose higher and higher and became hotter and hotter, all the birds and animals hurried away as fast as they could.

But Crocodile had short, squat legs that were not made for running and although he tried desperately to dash as fast as he could, he could not escape the fury of the hot flames. The flames burned his smooth shiny back till it was as cracked and gnarled as the rocky riverbank.

Finally, Crocodile reached the river and leapt into the cool water.

Crocodile wears a rough, scaly skin till today; a memory of the bitter lesson he learnt that day long ago – never trouble Trouble until Trouble troubles you!



The culture and traditions of the Native American tribes that lived on the vast continent of North America were deeply influenced by nature, animals and the elements like the wind, the rain and the Sun. The stories these enterprising people made up were both imaginative and creative. In this tale we are told...



Why the bat has no friends

Many years ago, when the stars in the sky were young, there was a Great War between the birds and the animals on Earth. No one knows what triggered off this Great War, but all those involved in the fight took it very seriously indeed.

Led by their king, the Eagle, the birds flew to one side of the battlefield and assembled there. The four-legged creatures all assembled on the other side of the field, under the leadership of their king, the Lion.

Soon, the war began. What a noise and commotion there was as the two sides fought each other with all the weapons available to them. The birds with their flapping wings and sharp, pointed beaks pecked their opponents and clawed their bodies. The animals, in turn, used their teeth, horns and claws to attack.

They had powerful limbs and rippling muscles, so they got the upper hand early in the war. When Bat saw that the birds seemed to be losing, he hid behind a bush, so that he did not have to take part in the battle.

After the battle for the day was over, the animals walked back to their camp. They were very pleased with the splendid fight they had put up and sat around discussing their victory.

"Weren't we just great today?" said Buffalo proudly. "We taught those miserable birds a lesson. They'll think twice before taking us on again."

"Yes. We were really great!" cried Bat in his high-pitched voice.

All the animals stared at Bat in surprise. "What are you doing here with us?" they asked. "You have wings, so you should be with the birds. How come you are on this side of the field?"

Bear growled at Bat: "You are an enemy! You are from our opponents' side! I'm going to eat you as soon as I can!" He tried to pounce on Bat.

"Hey! I'm not with the birds," said Bat loudly. "I have wings, but haven't you noticed that I have sharp teeth too, like all of you. Have you ever heard of a bird with teeth?"





The animals fell
silent when they heard
this argument.

“Well then, I guess you are one of us after all,” said Lion.

The next day, there was another battle and Bat marched along with the animals’ team. The birds flew in from the other side. This time the birds had planned their strategy very carefully and cleverly, however, and they flew close together as an army, with the light of the sun behind them. The bright light blinded the animals and the birds took advantage of this to set upon them with tearing talons and vicious beaks. The birds soon gained the upper hand. Once more, Bat went and hid behind a bush till the action was over.

When the battle was over for the day and the birds began to wing their way back to camp victoriously, Bat quietly joined them.

“What a brilliantly fought victory that was,” Eagle told his subjects later, when they had all gathered together.

“Yes, indeed!” said Bat. “I am so proud of our warriors!”

“Bat!” said Eagle in astonishment. “What are you doing here? You belong to the other side!”

“Exactly!” cried Crow angrily. “Shall I peck him and drive him back where he belongs?”

“Hey! Wait a minute!” said Bat. “I don’t belong with the animals! I belong with you. I have a pair of fine wings just like all of you.” He flapped his black wings vigorously.

“Well! Then, I suppose you are a bird,” agreed Eagle.

Bat continued to behave in this way when new battles were fought everyday between the animals and the birds. When he saw that the side he was on was losing, he pretended to be on the other side.

At last, however, the birds and the animals got tired of fighting one another and the two kings, Lion and Eagle, decided to call a Peace Council to settle the longstanding dispute. When all the animals gathered for the meeting and took their places with their respective sides, Bat was trapped. He could no longer pretend he belonged to both sides the way he had done all along. The two kings also realised what he had done and were very angry.

“Friends should always be truthful and sincere,” they told Bat. “When they help one another, they must never pretend to be one thing when they are quite another. Your behaviour has been treacherous, so though you have wings, you will never fly with birds and though you have teeth, you will never roam with animals. You will neither belong with the animals nor the birds. You will fly only at night when other birds are asleep and the animals are out hunting. Since you are not to be trusted, you will never have any friends either, Bat, among the creatures that fly or those that walk.”

And that is why, till today, Bat always flies only at night and doesn't have any friends.



The egret is a long-legged white bird that often stands on the back of cattle to catch insects that burrow into the animals' skin. This arrangement suits both creatures well. The cattle are rid of unwelcome pests and the egrets get easy access to delicious, ready meals! In this charming tale from the Philippines, in a delightful way, we are told...

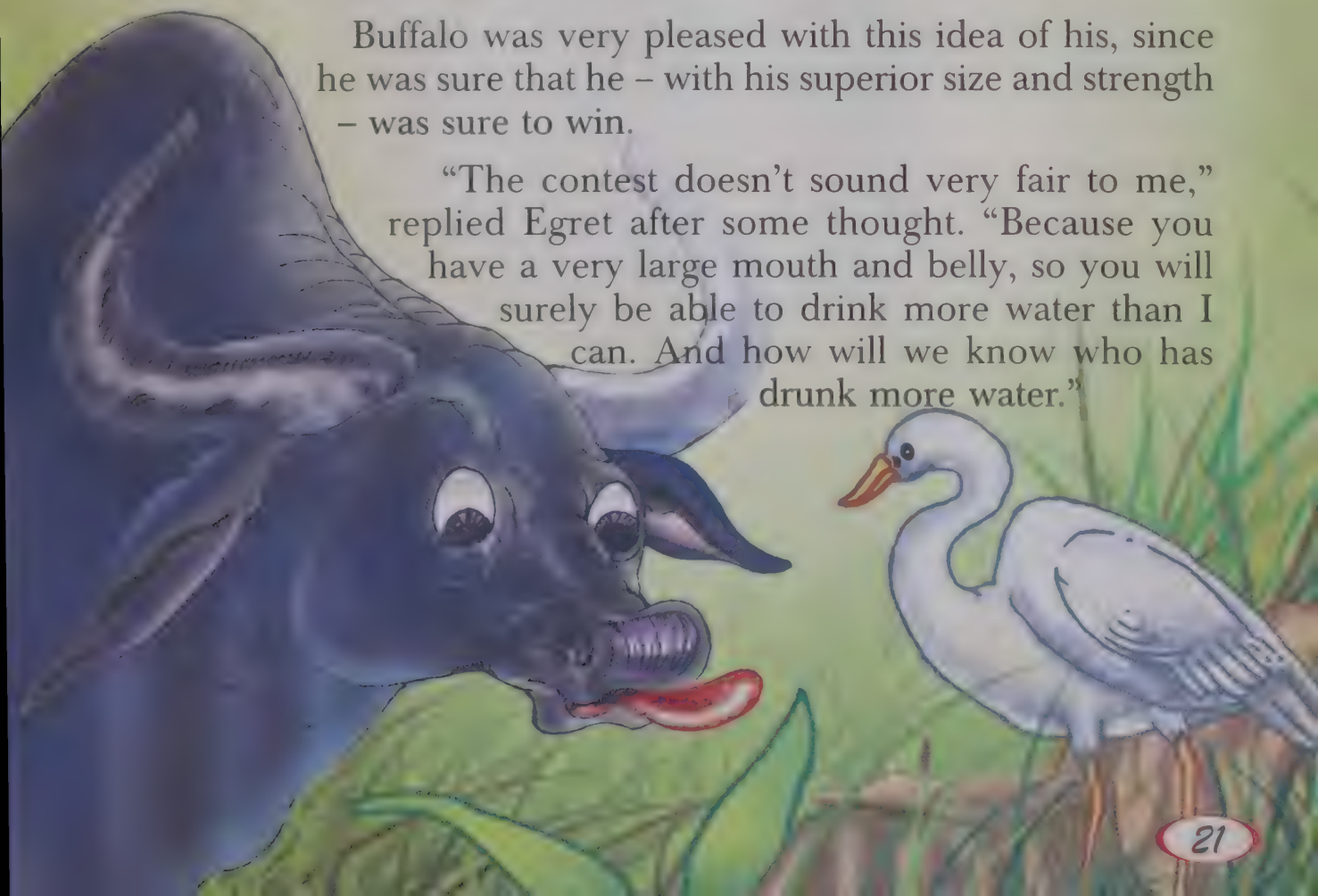
Why the egret rides on the water buffalo

At the time when this story began, many moons ago, the water buffalo and the egret – both lived in the same neighbourhood – were at loggerheads with each other. They bickered and fought ceaselessly from dawn till dusk, because each one wanted to boss over the other and be supreme.

They fought so much that, finally, both grew weary and Buffalo told Egret, “It is high time we resolved our differences once and for all. I propose that we have a contest to decide who can drink the most water from the nearby river. The winner of the contest will get to make the loser his slave forever!”

Buffalo was very pleased with this idea of his, since he was sure that he – with his superior size and strength – was sure to win.

“The contest doesn’t sound very fair to me,” replied Egret after some thought. “Because you have a very large mouth and belly, so you will surely be able to drink more water than I can. And how will we know who has drunk more water.”



"We will watch the level of the river," said Buffalo. "Whoever makes its level sink and become shallow would obviously have drunk more."

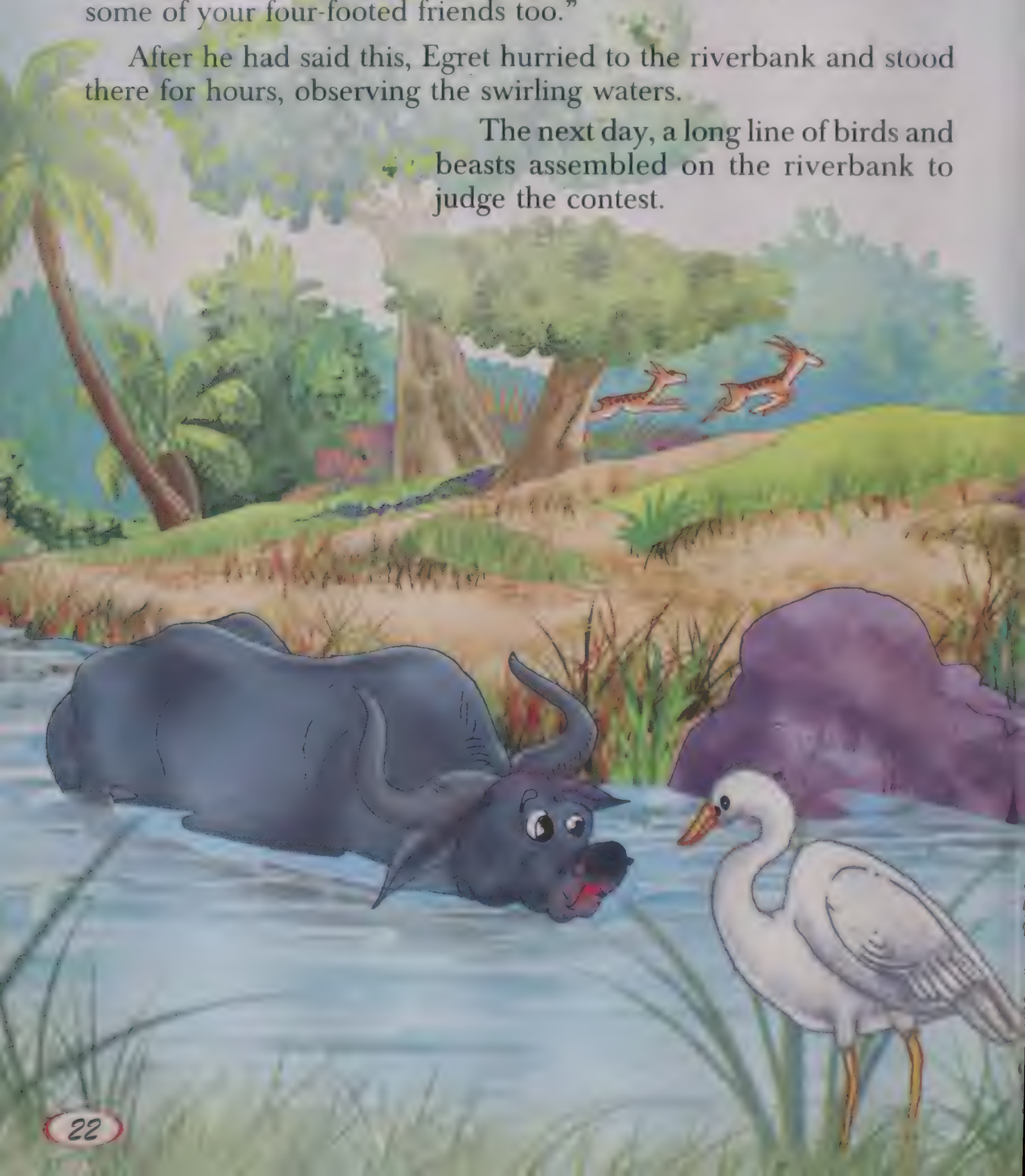
"Very well," said Egret. "I don't want to be a bad sport, so I agree to your terms."

Buffalo was delighted to hear this. "Let's go down to the river straightaway," he said enthusiastically.

"Hold on!" said Egret. "How can we have a contest without any judges? Let's wait till tomorrow. By that time, I'll invite some of my feathered friends to come and judge our contest and you can invite some of your four-footed friends too."

After he had said this, Egret hurried to the riverbank and stood there for hours, observing the swirling waters.

The next day, a long line of birds and beasts assembled on the riverbank to judge the contest.





“Let Egret drink first,” said confident Buffalo.

“No! You drink first,” insisted Egret.

“If I drink first, there will be no water left for you,” scoffed Buffalo contemptuously.

Egret turned to the listening judges. “This contest was Buffalo’s idea. So don’t you think he should rightfully be the one to start it?”

“Yes! Yes!” replied the judges, nodding their heads.

“All right!” said Buffalo ungraciously. He bent his big black head, dipped his mouth in the water and began to drink. He drank and drank till his tummy bulged. He drank as if he would never stop. But strangely enough, the more Buffalo drank, the deeper the water became and the more its level seemed to rise! In despair, Buffalo began to drink faster.

Egret watched with a sly smile. No one else had observed that at that time of day, the tide from the sea was rising. As the water gushed in from the sea through the mouth of the river, the level of the water rose. The longer Buffalo drank, the higher went the tide.

Finally, when tired Buffalo could not drink even one more drop of water, he stopped. As the judges chuckled, he challenged Egret. “Laugh all you like, but now it’s Egret’s turn! Let’s see what a puny bird like him can do!”

"After watching your mighty efforts, I'm very nervous," Egret replied quickly. "Can you please give me some time to calm my nerves before I begin?" His voice trembled as he spoke.

"We think that's a fair request and you should accede to it," the judges said.

So Egret sat quietly beside the riverbank and closed his eyes.

After a while, Buffalo became impatient. "Hurry up!" he shouted angrily.

"I want to look my best when I compete," said Egret. "So please let me arrange my ruffled feathers." He began to arrange his feathers unhurriedly.

Finally, when he saw that the tide had turned and the waters had started flowing back into the sea, he went to the water's edge and began to drink.

As he drank, the judges found to their amazement that the level of the water was falling and the river was becoming shallower! Buffalo watched in disbelief and despair.

Finally, when the tide was entirely out and the river was very shallow, Egret lifted her bill from the water triumphantly. "What is your verdict?" she asked the judges.

"Egret wins the contest!" all the judges cried in unison. "Buffalo loses. From today, he has to be the slave of Egret."

And that is why, till this very day, the egret sits upon the back of the buffalo and pokes and prods him with his beak!



6169

W. A. R. M. - 1000000000
High School - 1000000000
1000000000

6169

361

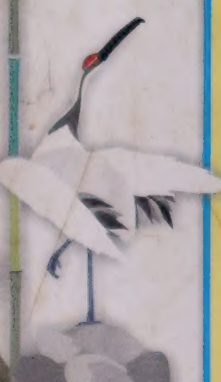


Animal Folk Tales

from
Around the World

Animals and birds enliven our world. Since all creatures have their own unique appearance, man has wondered how many of these came to be. The imaginative stories he wove to explain these passed into folklore throughout the world. How the tiger acquired stripes, how the crocodile got its rough, scaly back, why the dog barks at and chases everything it sees... and other interesting animal stories.

The tales in this book come from all corners of the globe – North America, Africa, Europe, Australia, South-east Asia and our own beautiful land India – and bring us glimpses of faraway lands.



Mumbai-based Santhini Govindan is an award-winning children's writer. Many of her short stories have appeared in *The Hindu*, *The Deccan Herald*, *The Sunday Observer*, *Children's World*, *Tinkle*, *Champak*, *Children's Digest*, *PCM Children's Magazine* and *Highlights for Children* (published from Pennsylvania, USA).

Published by major publishers her books have also been translated into Hindi, Bengali and other Indian languages.

9227 B

Rs. 36/-

ISBN 81-780-6051-5



9 788178 060514



PANDA
An imprint of Unicorn Books

Distributed by Pustak Mahal
Delhi • Mumbai • Patna • Hyderabad • Bangalore

Visit our online bookstore: www.pustakmahal.com